

2016 Alaska Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

Brent Watkins, House District 32
Submitted September 15th

Alaska PTA aka Alaska Congress of Parents and Teachers, Inc. represents approximately 7,000 members from 116 schools around the state. The Alaska PTA Advocacy Committee would deeply appreciate your taking the time to answer our questions about your perspective on public education in Alaska. Providing quality public education is one of the most important sectors that we can invest in, when one considers the impact it has on the future of our children and thus the competitiveness of our state.

The questionnaire will be used to provide a synopsis of candidate positions to our members, in order to better inform them of candidate positions prior to the November election. We respectfully ask that you complete and submit the questionnaire prior to September 15th, 2016.

1. Please provide your name and the Alaska Legislative seat you are a candidate for.

Brent Watkins, House District 32

2. What do you see as the three top challenges facing the delivery of public education in Alaska today?

(See responses on last page)

3. What is your understanding of the “Every Student Succeeds Act”, and what potential effects it can have on public education in Alaska?

(See responses on last page)

For each of the last six years, school districts across Alaska have cut their budgets and eliminated programs and positions due to local, state and federal funding levels that have remained flat. Thus we have the following questions:

4. Do you think Alaska public schools are adequately funded?

(See responses on last page)

5. Would you support an alternate revenue stream for public education in Alaska (one example would be an education head tax similar to that which was in place in 1980)?

(See responses on last page)

6. Do you support the continued minimum enrollment of 10 students to keep rural Alaska schools open to serve our rural communities and students? AND Do you support increasing graduation rates among Alaska Native students since according the National Center for Education Statistics they have one of the lowest graduation rates in the country and are residing in many of these rural small school locations?

(See responses on last page)

7. Would you support a comprehensive fiscal plan that includes new revenue streams, in order to preserve funding for public education?

(See responses on last page)

There is a large body of research that documents the benefits of early childhood education on overall student outcome, and graduation rates. In addition, this research suggests that pre-kindergarten programs can reduce the possibility of a student becoming incarcerated later in life.

8. Do you support funding universal pre-kindergarten as part of a complete education system in Alaska?

(See responses below)

The Alaska Legislature has considered legislation that proposed a constitutional amendment to allow public money to be spent on private schools, especially. Private schools can pick and choose students and are not held to the same standards as public schools for the quality and content of education. Public schools serve all students, regardless of race, religion, disability, or socioeconomic status.

9. Do you support changing the Alaska Constitution to allow public money to be spent on private or religious schools?

(See responses below)

Research suggests parental involvement in a child's education contributes to improved academic performance, better social skills, greater attendance rate, and a higher likelihood of completing a post-secondary education.

10. Do you support the federal government funding a statewide family engagement center for Alaska?

(See responses below)

The top challenges I see for delivering public education, would be accessibility to programs like OWL and good internet connections for schools. Connecting our kids helps them realize they are part of a larger group of peers than they see. They can share problems and solutions that are unique to rural Alaska. Keeping good safety nets in place in our schools for at risk students is vital. Keeping kids fed and knowing they have a safe place, lets them relax enough to learn on academic and social levels. They feel worth. That inspires.

Boiler plate education goals and programs are not the best fit for Alaska. Though a college education can be very important, we need to embrace the fact that the skills needed around our state are often more hands on than not. We need to show that going to work is not a bad thing. We point the focus of our education at collage and often undervalue the goals and educational requirements of folks that live in rural Alaska and keep it running.

Yes a way to show a program is working is needed. I'm not sure the best fit for Akron, Ohio is the best fit for Beluga, Ak.

The funding in schools needs a lot of outside, third party auditing. I do not see the resources used equally across districts or the State. Too much waste and creative explanations for grants and spending have diverted to much money from the program, from the kids in class learning. I watch parking places be left off blueprints to pad numbers of spaces needed to be built and maintained, then music is the top of the chop list every time there is 'no money'. The phrase "its for the children" has come to really mean, 'that's a contractual liability', or to be blunt, 'not out of my pocket'.

To provide long term funding for schools we should be requiring carbon credit purchases from all cruise ships and outside corporations that do business in Alaska. We get paid in long term contracts typically 50 plus years to watch our parks and forests grow. Many crops qualify for carbon credit so it could help provide local revenue streams. One third of marijuana tax should be put to rehab and mental health. This would open up more funding sources for addressing issues that are often at the root of the problems in our schools. Another way to maximize local funds, would be to use our high school and collage student to perform the hundreds of studies that have become 'necessary for grants.' These kids know our towns inside and out. Give scholarships for school or training, instead of sending the money to Illinois. Kids learn pride in place. They learn job skills and municipalities get a much better price on their studies

If a school is closed it still costs money for it to sit empty. That is a true waste. To run a school with low student count is inefficient, but only inefficient on an accountants spread sheet. We need to be sure to teach the skills that are needed locally, to show kids that you are not making some kind of a bad choice because you stayed and worked in your home town. When we show kids that they matter, that we are here to grow them, that we see the skills they need ,then they kids we are loosing will have a reason to invest their time in class. Show a kid you respect them and they can do amazing things. This is a kindergarten up need. limit home work ,involve parents in programs instead. Engage them all. Its harder, but the product will be better. I do not think vouchers are a good idea. Thank you folks. Respectfully Brent Watkins